THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Government conveyed the anguish and deep anger of the Indian people to the Foreign Minister of Pakistan during his visit to Delhi on June 12,1999. Government underlined that these acts constitute a gross violation of the Geneva Convention, and demanded of Pakistan that the guilty be identified and punished.

The attention of the international community was drawn to these brutal acts of Pakistan including through our statement to the UN General Assembly in New York on September 22,1999. Government will continue to take up the matter in appropriate international forums.

Passport Office at Siliguri

2370. SHRI DAWA LAMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether there is any proposal to open a Passport Office at Siliguri; and

(b) if so, the time-frame thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, a proposal to open a Passport Application Collection Centre at Siliguri is under the consideration of the Government.

Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails

2371. SHRI N. THALAVAI SUNDARAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether it is a fact that 19 fishermen from Kanyakumari Districts of Tamil Nadu are in Pakistani jails; and

(b) if so, what steps are being taken by Government for the early release of the Indian Fishermen from Pakistani jails?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The matter has been taken up with the Government of Pakistan through diplomatic channels and is being pursued purposefully. It is our hope and expectation that these fishermen would be released by Pakistan at the earliest.

Posting of Ambassadors

2372. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the newsitem appearing in the Telegraph dated 25th November, 1999 under the caption, "Envoys flock to Delhi for plum posts";

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether it is a healthy practice for the Indian Ambassadors in various capital across the world to abandon their post and flock to New Delhi to lobby for their posting; and

(d) if not, what steps Government propose to take to discourage this tendency?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir,

(b) to (d) Heads of Mission from abroad are required to visit the Headquarters of the Ministry in Delhi for official purposes with the prior approval of the Ministry of External Affairs. These visits *inter alia,* include high level, bilateral visits, Joint Commission Meetings, Foreign Office Consultations etc. In addition, Heads of Mission are also sanctioned leave on personal and emergency grounds to visit India with the prior approval of the Ministry of External Affairs. Heads of Mission are not permitted to leave station without authos-isation by the Ministry.